

**Topics in Contemporary Political and Critical Theory:
Utopia and Dystopia
(Politics 118, Summer Session I, 2015)**

MW 1:00-4:30 pm, Social Sciences 2, Room 171, University of California, Santa Cruz

Andrew J. Wood, Instructor

anjwood@ucsc.edu

Office Hours: W 12:00-1:00 pm & 5:00-6:00 pm, Merrill 137

Course Description and Goals

This course in political and critical theory focuses around the diverse assemblage of thought, art, and literature identified broadly as utopian and/or dystopian. The course follows the hypothesis that while the 19th century provided the context for a vast renaissance of utopian thought, the traumatic historical events of the first half of the 20th century inspired an important shift towards dystopian thought as hegemonic. This shift is partly seen in the political imagination as represented in fictional prose and art, but also in the supplanting of the totalizing theories of C19 and early C20 (i.e. most especially Marxian theories of economic totality) by the post-modern and post-structuralist schools as a major current in political theory. In order to engage, and perhaps contest, this hypothesis, we shall look at and listen to utopian and dystopian novels and films as political theoretical texts alongside contemporary essays in critical theory. The purpose of the course is to expose students to a variety of literary and critical works, and to use utopian and dystopian thought as a window into foundational engagement with Marxian, Psychoanalytic, Anarchist, Post-structuralist, Feminist, Queer, and Post-colonial theories.

Guiding Questions

1. What roles do imagined futures play in the political institutions and actions of the present?
2. Can we explain the significance of the shift in the 19th century utopian to the 20th century dystopian imaginative? Or, can we connect these apparently disparate sets of writings and see them as inherently linked?
3. Is utopian thought still relevant in contemporary politics?
4. Much of 19th century utopian literature focuses on class politics, while 20th century dystopian literature deals more with the intersections of class, race, and gender. How can we account for this discontinuity?
5. Why have free market and capitalist theories of political economy been largely understood as realist while post/anti-capitalist theories (e.g. Marxist, Anarchist) have been routinely dismissed as utopian?
6. Can we situate utopian or dystopian thought and literature in radical or conservative politics or is such classification erroneous?
7. What makes utopias and/or dystopias believable or unbelievable?

8. Why might it be that these projections of the future are radically different (either for good or for ill) than the present? Would a continuance of present political, social, and economic conditions be a utopian or dystopian projection? Or neither?
9. Are all governments/governing projects/forms of governmentality somehow based on utopian tendencies?

Grading & Best Practices

Grades for this course will be determined through three factors: a mid-term 5 page paper (25%), a final 10-12 page paper (50%), and class participation (25%). Grading guidelines for the papers and for class participation will be posted on ecommons. Included in the class participation grade will be active engagement in our class meetings. This includes respectful and thoughtful debate, raising questions related to the material, and/or attending office hours. You must come to class caught up on your reading. Proper preparation is a necessity for high quality discussions, as well as for high quality grades. Each week, you must also come prepared with two written questions relevant to the reading (that is, two questions **per class**, not two per reading). These two questions should be typed and placed on the front desk prior to the beginning of each class meeting. Class discussion should address these and other questions surrounding the readings and lectures.

Summer Session Students with Disabilities

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me as soon as possible, preferably within the first week of the Summer Session. Contact DRC by phone at [831-459-2089](tel:831-459-2089) or by email at drc@ucsc.edu for more information.

Citation in Papers:

You may utilize either MLA or Chicago style citation formats. Please make sure that whichever format you decide to use, you use consistently and correctly. Failure to cite correctly constitutes plagiarism.

Academic Integrity & Unauthorized Sale of Course Notes:

Familiarize yourself with the University's principles, policies, and procedures regarding breaches of academic integrity. These can be found on the "academic integrity" website at: http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/undergraduate_students/. If you are unsure about anything that you read on this website, or what is acceptable or not acceptable in completing assignments for this course, please ask me. If you cheat, I will have no choice but to report you and impose the academic penalty of failure in the class. While I encourage you to collaborate with each other, including sharing notes if you choose to do so, you may not sell your notes to anyone whether another student or a

company. Please see the message of the Interim Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education for more information: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2010/11/course-notes-notehall.html>

Assigned Texts

In addition to the course reader, the following texts are required for the course. Each has an ISBN number listed, so that if you prefer to order used copies (rather than purchasing locally), you are free to do so. Earlier editions are also acceptable in most cases (but feel free to check in with me if you are unsure). Although I strongly encourage you to purchase these texts, there are copies on 24-hour reserve at McHenry Library, and several are also available to read at the Subrosa free space on Pacific Avenue. If you are unable to afford or otherwise gain access to the texts, please see me for accommodation.

Atwood, Margaret. 1986. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor Books.
(ISBN: 978-0-385-49081-8) \$9.99 New, <\$1 Used

Bellamy, Edward. 1982. *Looking Backward*. New York: Penguin Books.
(ISBN: 0-14-039018-9) \$4 New, <\$1 Used

Bey, Hakim. 2011. *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone*. Pacific Publishing Studio.
(ISBN: 9781460901779) *This is also widely available for free online.* \$7 New, \$5 Used

Claeys, Gregory & Towere Sargent, Lyman (ed.s). 1999. *The Utopia Reader*. New York: NYU press. (ISBN 978-0-8147-1571-0) \$20 New, \$3-4 Used

Freud, Sigmund. 1989. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton Company. (ISBN: 0-393-30158-3) \$10 New, \$2-3 Used

Liotard, Jacques. 1984. *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (ISBN: 0-8166-1173-4) \$15 New, \$5 Used

Moore, Alan. 1988. *V for Vendetta*. New York: Vertigo/DC Comics.
(ISBN: 978-0-930289-52-2) \$19.99 New, \$10 Used

Morris, William. 1993. *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*. New York: Penguin Books. (ISBN: 978-0-14-043330-2)***This edition only please.* \$15 New, \$3-4 Used

Reading Schedule:

Week One [Lecture 1: Background] What is utopian thought? Does utopia contain or disguise dystopia?

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 77-93.

Morris, William. "Forward to More's *Utopia*" in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, pp. 373-375

Montaigne, Michel. "Of the Cannibals." (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 99-103

"Shakers," "Amana," and "Oneida" readings. (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 182-192.

Fourier, Charles. Selected writings. (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 192-199.

*Recommended: Jameson, Frederic. "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?" in *Archaeologies of the Future*. pp. 281-295.

Suggested Reading: Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method, Utopia (More), The Republic (Plato), The Giver (Lowry), The Chronicles of Narnia (Lewis), Wimmer, Langdon*. 2013. "Why so few utopias in science fiction cinema" Techopolis (web): <http://technopolis.blogspot.com/2013/01/why-so-few-utopias-in-science-fiction.html>

Suggested Viewing: *Things to Come* (Wells), *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming), *Her* (Jonze)

Week One [Lecture 2: Industrialism and Socialist Utopias] Is socialism always utopian? Is capitalism? How does mechanization affect utopian and dystopian imaginative futures? Given Marx's materialist view of history, how is his thought dismissed as idealist or utopian? ***Paper One Topics Distributed**

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. (full text, pp. 7-231)

Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations* (course reader) pp. 454-457 & 660-662.

Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich. *Manifesto of the Communist Party, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Theses on Feuerbach, and The German Ideology* excerpts contained in *The Marx-Engels Reader* (course reader) pp. 66-93, 143-145, 147-200, 469-500.

Morris, "A Review of *Looking Backward*" in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, pp. 353-358.

Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. *Herland* (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 319-329.

*Recommended: *Women and Economics*

Suggested Reading: Terdiman, Richard. "Counter-Humorists" in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (course reader) pp. 198-226.

Suggested viewing: *Metropolis* (Laing), *The Wall* (Pink Floyd)

Week Two [Lecture 1: Agrarian Socialist Utopia]

Morris, William. *News from Nowhere*. And "The Hopes of Civilization." pp. 41-228 & 307-328.

Wells, H.G. *A Modern Utopia* (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 312-319

Kropotkin, Peter. "Introduction" to *Mutual Aid* (ecommons) pp. 1-8

Wilde, Oscar. "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (ecommons) pp. 1-24.

Orwell, George. "Review of 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' by Oscar Wilde" (ecommons) pp. 426-428.

Suggested Reading: *The Conquest of Bread* (Kropotkin), *The Art of Not Being Governed* (Scott)

Suggested Viewing: *Sawaan baan na* [trans. *Agrarian Utopia*] (Raksasad), *Back to the Garden* (Tomlinson), *The Beach* (Boyle)

Week Two [Lecture 2: Moving Toward Dystopia: Critiques of Utopias]

***5 page paper due**

What are the different frameworks for critiquing utopias? Why are some theories dismissed as utopian? Is utopia a politically dangerous conception? How might dystopia be linked to utopia in both positive and negative ways?

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. (full text, pp. 3-112)

Chesterton. *The Man Who Was Thursday* (course reader) pp. 18-38

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. (course reader) pp. 161-189.

*Recommended: Ollman, Bertell. 2005. "The Utopian Vision of the Future (Then and Now): A Marxist Critique," *Monthly Review*. Vol. 5, Issue 3. <http://monthlyreview.org/2005/07/01/the-utopian-vision-of-the-future-then-and-now-a-marxist-critique/>

*Recommended: Zizek, Slavoj. 2011. *Living in the End Times*. Brooklyn: Verso. (especially pp. 1-53).

Suggested Reading: Gray, John. & Ash, Alex. 2012. "John Gray on Critiques of Utopia and Apocalypse," *Five Books Online*. <http://fivebooks.com/interviews/john-gray-on-critiques-utopia-and-apocalypse>, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Thompson)

Suggested Viewing: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry), *Abre Los Ojos/Vanilla Sky* (Amenábar/Crowe)

Week Three [Lecture 1: Capital, Fascism, and Dystopia] How has the experience (direct and imaginative) of fascism affected projected futures? How might theorists connect capital and fascism? How might fascism be conceived as a utopian project? How does mass media affect dystopian imagination?

Moore, Alan. *V for Vendetta*. (full text, pp. 9-286)

Horkheimer & Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" contained in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (ecommons) pp. 94-136.

Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art* (course reader) pp. 1-17, 78-86, and 103-120.

Marcuse, Herbert. "Conclusion" to *One Dimensional Man*. (course reader) pp. 247-257.

*Recommended: Burdekin, Katherine. *Swastika Night* (selections in *Utopia Reader*) pp. 344-346

*Recommended: Harvey, David. "Post-modernism" in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (course reader) pp. 39-65.

Brazil (film viewed in class)

Suggested Viewing: *The Matrix* (Wachowski), *Videodrome* (Lynch), *The Truman Show* (Weir), *They Live* (Carpenter), *Gattaca* (Niccol), *V for Vendetta* (McTeigue)

Week Three [Lecture 2: Power Constriction, Ideology, and Dystopia] How is power conceived differently in the 20th century? How might "post-Marxist" and "late Marxist"

thinkers differ in their conceptions of power? Are the post-structuralist and post-modernist conceptions of power more or less totalizing than earlier Marxist and Freudian conceptions? How might this affect political action?

Lyotard, Jacques. *The Post-Modern Condition*. (full text, pp. 3-67)

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (ecommons) pp. 155-183.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideological State Apparatuses" (course reader) pp. 1-60

May, Todd. *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism* (course reader) pp. 45-66.

Suggested Reading: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Zizek)

Suggested Viewing: *Eraserhead* (Lynch), *The Hunger Games* (Ross), *Escape from New York* (Carpenter), *Minority Report* (Spielberg)

Week Four [Lecture 1: Power, Resistance, and the Body] Why might total equality be considered a utopian ideal? What might we argue is the significance of gender being such a consistent theme in dystopian writings?

Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended* (first two lectures) pp. 1-41, "Conclusion" to *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. pp. 135-159, and "The body of the condemned" in *Discipline and Punish* pp. 3-31 (course reader)

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power* pp. 83-105 and *Gender Trouble* (course reader) pp. 2-8, 144-150, and 183-203

Stoler, Ann. "Towards a Genealogy of Racisms" from *Race and the Education of Desire*. (course reader) pp. 55-94

*Recommended in Reader: Vaneigem, Raoul. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. (course reader) pp. 142-160 & 212-239

Week Four [Lecture 2: Identity Politics (Introduction)] What are identity politics? How are they understood? What types of political movements and actions do we see associated with identity politics?

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale* (Chap. 1-9)

Delaney, Samuel. *The Motion of Light in Water*. (course reader) pp. 290-295.

Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

(course reader) pp. 49-60.

*Recommended: Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (especially) pp. 1-27.

Suggested reading: *Culture and Imperialism* (Said)

Week Five [Lecture 1: Identity Politics: Utopias, Dystopias, and Everything Between]
How can we rethink the relationship between identity and interest?

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale* (Chap. 10-15)

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (course reader).

bell hooks, *where we stand: class matters* (course reader) pp. 1-23 & 89-110

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class* (course reader) pp. 87-126 & 137-148.

*Recommended in Reader: Ramnath, Maia. *Haj to Utopia*. pp. 1-15.

Children of Men (film viewed in class)

Suggested Reading: *After Evil* (Meister), *Politics of the Veil* (Scott)

Suggested Viewing: *Equilibrium* (Wimmer), *La Haine* [trans. *Hate*] (Kassovitz), *Suburbia* (Spheeris), *Logan's Run* (Anderson), *Land of the Dead* (Romero)

Week Five [Lecture 2: Post-capitalist Visions]

***Final Paper Due**

How can we imagine the future, if not as capitalist? What is the significance of the setting of utopias in past 'glory days' and how are these pasts invented?

Bey, T.A.Z. *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (full text, pp. 1-102)

Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (course reader) pp. 24-71

Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*. (course reader, pp. 4-25)

Graeber, David. *Debt*. (course reader) pp. 361-391

Decoder (film viewed in class)

Suggested Viewing: *Pleasantville* (Ross), *Idiocracy* (Judge)

Final Paper Assignment

For your final paper assignment, you will choose one novel (either utopian, dystopian, or both) to analyze in 10-12 pages utilizing the literature and theoretical texts examined in class, lecture notes, etc. (you must utilize at least three of the theoretical texts assigned in the course reading). A list of suggested titles are below. If you have another text that you would prefer to engage in your paper, please discuss this text with me for approval.

Under special circumstances (and only with my approval), you may make utopian/dystopian visual or musical arts the focus of your analysis. CAUTION: Many of these novels have been adapted into films. Though you are, of course, free to view these, beware that your paper should focus on the written version. I also encourage you to begin reading the novel of your choice for this assignment early in the quarter.

Bataille, *Story of the Eye*
Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*
Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
Camus, *The Plague*
Chesterton, *The Man Who was Thursday*
Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sleep?*
Garland, *The Beach*
Haldane, *Man's World*
Huxley, *Brave New World*
Huxley, *Island*
Jordan, *When She Woke*
Kafka, *The Trial*
Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*
Matheson, *I Am Legend*
McCarthy, *The Road*
Moore, *Watchmen*
Orwell, *1984*
Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*
Rand, *Anthem*
Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*
Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*
Skinner, *Walden Two*
Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*
Vonnegut, *Player Piano*
Zamyatin, *We*